

Speech Given for the 2023 Gandhi Jayanti Ceremony: Non-violence and Mahatma Gandhi

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A brief overview of the significance of Gandhi Jayanti

Gandhi Jayanti holds great significance as it commemorates the birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi, a prominent figure in India's struggle for independence and an international symbol of nonviolent resistance. This annual observance on October 2nd serves as a reminder of Gandhi's enduring legacy and profound global impact.

Gandhi Jayanti is not merely a historical celebration but a manifestation of the principles he embraced. Gandhi's dedication to non-violence, civil disobedience, and social justice remains pertinent in contemporary society. It serves as a moral compass, inspiring individuals and



movements worldwide to address issues of injustice, inequality, and oppression through peaceful means.

Gandhi Jayanti encourages us to think of the significance of non-violence, truth, and societal transformation, fostering a sense of unity and a dedication to the building of a more equitable and peaceful world.

Commemorating Mahatma Gandhi's life and principles

The commemoration of Mahatma Gandhi's life and principles holds a profound significance for a number of reasons. First, Gandhi stands as an eminent historical person who assumed a pivotal role in India's quest for independence. His leadership and a

doctrine of non-violent resistance exerted instrumental influence in shaping historical trajectories. Recognizing his existence serves as a recollection of the achievements in the struggle against colonialism and the lasting influence of peaceful movements in attaining political transformation.

Gandhi's teachings continue as an enduring source of moral and ethical guidance for both individuals and societies. His commitment to truth, integrity, and non-violence provides a framework for navigating complex ethical dilemmas and conflicts in contemporary societal contexts. The commemoration of his principles stands as a source of motivation for individuals striving to uphold moral guidelines in their personal and professional domains.

His teachings attain heightened importance in a world tarnished by conflicts and divisions. His advocacy for non-violence as a means of conflict resolution underscores the importance of peaceful dialogue and reconciliation in the intricate geopolitical landscape of the contemporary era. Commemorating his life fosters the pursuit of non-violent resolutions to current disputes and adversities.

In addition, Gandhi's unwavering commitment to social justice, encompassing endeavours to eliminate untouchability and foster gender equality, serves as a foundation of motivation for contemporary movements advocating social reform. His resolute dedication to addressing social disparities reminds us of the ongoing necessity to strive for equity, inclusivity, and equitable opportunities within our societies.

Now, let's explore the concept of non-violence and its moral and ethical principles

The concept of non-violence represents a foundational ethical tenet focused on the avoidance of causing harm or injury to others, whether through physical deeds, verbal expressions, or mental contemplations. It constitutes a philosophical and practical framework that emphasizes the importance of peaceful and non-aggressive conduct, aiming to address conflicts and disputes without resorting to violence. Non-violence highlights the conviction that every individual naturally possesses dignity and value, advocating for the resolution of disagreements and distinctions through dialogue, empathy, and collaboration, rather than through acts of aggression or harm.

Non-violence encompasses a broader commitment extending beyond the absence of physical violence, embracing values like compassion, tolerance, and reconciliation. It acknowledges that violence often perpetuates a cycle of harm and devastation, while non-violence strives to disrupt this cycle by fostering understanding and seeking common ground. Mahatma Gandhi,

a prominent champion of non-violence, perceived it as a potent force for driving societal and political transformations, appealing to the moral conscience of both individuals and governments.

The significance of non-violence as a moral and ethical principle is profound and far-reaching, with implications that extend to both individual and societal levels.

At the individual level, non-violence serves as a guiding moral principle. It stresses the importance of making ethical choices in one's daily life by refraining from causing harm to others physically, emotionally, or psychologically. Non-violence encourages individuals to promote virtues such as empathy, compassion, and self-control, fostering a sense of moral integrity and responsibility.

Ethically, non-violence upholds the principle of respecting the dignity and worth of every human being. It acknowledges that every person possesses equal rights and is entitled to live free from the threat of violence or harm. This serves as a central element for building just and harmonious societies where individuals coexist in a framework of mutual respect and fairness.

Non-violence also emphasizes the value of conflict resolution through peaceful means. It promotes the ethical imperative of seeking dialogue, compromise, and reconciliation in the face of disagreements or disputes, rather than resorting to aggression or violence. This approach to conflict resolution aligns with principles of justice, fairness, and the preservation of human rights, contributing to the overall wellbeing of society.

And, what was Gandhi's interpretation of non-violence?

Gandhi's interpretation of non-violence, or *ahimsa* in Sanskrit, is a foundation of his philosophy and a distinguishing feature of his approach to social and political change.

The term *ahimsa* literally translates to 'non-harming' or 'absence of harm'. Gandhi's interpretation of *ahimsa* extends beyond the mere avoidance of physical harm to include a comprehensive commitment to non-violence in thoughts, words, and actions. This means that non-violence, as understood by Gandhi, is not limited to renouncing from physical violence but also entails refraining from any form of harm caused by one's thoughts, spoken words, or deeds.

Gandhi believed that violence often stemmed from negative thoughts and attitudes, such as hatred, anger, or prejudice. Therefore, he emphasized the need to cultivate a mind-set of compassion, empathy, and understanding. This mental discipline involved replacing harmful

thoughts with constructive and loving ones, thereby addressing the root causes of violence at the cognitive level.

In addition to mental discipline, Gandhi stressed the importance of non-violence in one's spoken words. He advocated for truthful and respectful communication, encouraging individuals to avoid hurtful or offensive language. By promoting non-violent speech, he aimed to create an environment of mutual respect and harmony.

Gandhi's interpretation of non-violence was manifested in one's actions. He believed in the power of non-violent resistance as a means of confronting injustice and oppression. This approach involved passive resistance, civil disobedience, and other forms of non-cooperation with unjust systems. Through non-violent actions, Gandhi sought to challenge and transform oppressive structures without resorting to violence.

In essence, Mahatma Gandhi's holistic approach to *ahimsa* emphasized the interconnectedness of these aspects and their collective power to effect positive social and political change while upholding human dignity and ethics.

Therefore, is non-violence relevant in today's world?

The relevance of non-violence in today's world is significant, as it offers a constructive and ethical approach to addressing contemporary challenges and advancing societal progress.

Non-violence remains highly relevant in addressing conflicts and promoting peace in the modern world. In an era marked by political tensions, territorial disputes, and international conflicts, non-violent approaches provide viable alternatives to armed aggression. Non-violent conflict resolution strategies, such as negotiation, mediation, and diplomacy, offer peaceful means of resolving disputes and preventing the escalation of violence. Non-violence also contributes to the preservation of human rights and the prevention of civilian suffering in conflict zones, aligning with the principles of humanitarian law and global peacekeeping efforts.

Conclusion

In conclusion, non-violence, or *ahimsa*, encompasses a commitment to refraining from causing harm or injury to others physically, emotionally, or psychologically. It goes beyond the absence of physical violence to include non-harm in thoughts, words, and actions. Non-violence is rooted in the principles of truth, non-retaliation, forgiveness, and the willingness

to suffer for a just cause. It has been demonstrated as an effective means of achieving social and political change, often surpassing violent methods in terms of ethical and long-term impact.

The importance of practicing non-violence in our daily lives cannot be overstated. It serves as a moral and ethical compass, guiding individuals to make choices that uphold the dignity and wellbeing of others. By embracing non-violence, we foster an environment of respect, empathy, and peaceful conflict resolution. Non-violence encourages us to stand against injustice, discrimination, and oppression while promoting principles of fairness, inclusivity, and human rights.

By upholding the principles of non-violence, we not only honor the legacy of Mahatma Gandhi but also work towards a world where conflicts are resolved through dialogue, understanding, and cooperation, rather than through harm or aggression.

I would like to thank you all for your attention and I wish everyone a Happy Gandhi Jayanti!

Thank you.

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The speech, for the celebration of Gandhi Jayanti, was given at the Peace Park, Mahé, Seychelles, on 2 October 2023.